



Record of Decision

for the
Inyo National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan

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USDA Forest Service



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This Forest Plan establishes the management direction and associated long-range goals and objectives for the Inyo National Forest for the next ten to fifteen years.

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RECORD OF DECISION
USDA FOREST SERVICE

Final Environmental Impact Statement
Inyo National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan

Inyo, Mono, Fresno, Madera and Tulare Counties, California
Esmeralda and Mineral Counties, Nevada

Based on a thorough study of the resources of the Inyo National Forest, detailed analysis of six management alternatives, and review of public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Plan, I have selected the Preferred Alternative described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Final Plan to provide direction for management activities on the Inyo National Forest for the next ten to fifteen years. This record of decision summarizes the principal management objectives of the Forest Plan and the rationale for my decision.

Plan Direction

The Plan protects and enhances the environmental and recreation benefits provided by the Inyo National Forest while providing moderate levels of grazing use, minerals development, and timber harvest to support the local economy. The following summarizes key management direction and goals to be achieved over the ten-year period of Plan implementation.

Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area

The Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area will be managed under Interim Management Direction approved in 1985 until an Environmental Impact Statement is completed. Guidelines developed in the Environmental Impact Statement will become a part of the Forest Plan.

Range

Livestock grazing will continue at the current level of 41,400 Animal Unit Months to meet local demand. Additional water developments will be constructed and range conditions will be improved on 69,100 acres to increase the quality and quantity of forage on the Forest as part of overall measures to improve ecological conditions in riparian areas.

Recreation

Approximately fifty new camping units per year will be developed to increase Forest visitor capacity by 2,000 Persons At One Time. Existing sites will be reconstructed or rehabilitated to bring them up to standard. Two hundred and forty miles of trail will be constructed, including nordic and snowmobile trails and corridors which will be designated to minimize user conflicts. At least five or more new snowplay areas will be designated and additional

parking areas will be constructed to provide better access for winter recreationists.

Mammoth Mountain and June Mountain Ski Areas will be expanded to a total of 31,000 Skiers At One Time, the number approved in their development plans. Sherwin Bowl is designated as a potential winter sports area and a separate Environmental Impact Statement is being prepared. Any development will depend on results of that Environmental Impact Statement. Proposals for any additional development in the Mammoth/June area will be studied for cumulative environmental effects.

Prescription #16, Nordic Ski Area in the Draft, has been changed in the Final to Dispersed Recreation. This prescription permits developed nordic facilities only in conjunction with alpine base facilities or on the periphery of the prescription area. This will provide developed nordic opportunities while protecting the unique natural character of the area.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) routes will be designated for both winter and summer use by updating the existing 1977 Interagency Motor Vehicle Use Plan. Poleta Canyon will be the only open OHV area on the Forest. All other OHV use will be restricted to designated routes.

The Sierra National Forest, as the lead forest, will recommend the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River for Wild and Scenic River status. Until Congress acts on this recommendation, the river will be managed under Designated Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Prescriptions to protect its wild and scenic qualities.

Timber

The Allowable Sale Quantity will be reduced to 7.1 million board feet from the current 10.5 million board feet. This is enough to sustain markets while protecting other resource values of the Forest. Only 75,233 acres will be included in the suitable timber base.

Predominantly pure red fir stands in the San Joaquin Ridge area between Mammoth Lakes and June Lake are excluded from harvest for this planning period to protect scenic, recreation, and wildlife values in this popular recreation area. However, an additional 14,000 acres of mixed conifer timber type on 30 to 60 percent slopes could be harvested if stumpage values increase or technology such as helicopter logging becomes an economically viable harvest method. This has the potential to increase the Allowable Sale Quantity by approximately 1.3 million board feet per year.

Only uneven-aged management will be used in timber stands west of U.S. 395 to preserve visual, recreation, and wildlife values in the Mammoth/June area. Even-aged silvicultural practices will be applied east of U.S. 395. The method selected will be determined on a site-specific basis, and clearcutting will be used only where it is the optimum silvicultural method.

Fuelwood available to local users will increase slightly from the current supply of 10,000 cords to 10,600 cords annually.

Water

Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines emphasize the protection and restoration of riparian areas and include direction for locating facilities, managing livestock, applying strict standards for earth-disturbing activities, and limiting specific activities.

Desert springs will be protected and all range, fish and wildlife habitat improvement projects and silvicultural prescriptions will maintain or enhance the condition of riparian areas.

Watershed improvement is scheduled for 350 acres annually during the planning period.

Wilderness and Research Natural Areas

The Plan recommends 172,600 acres for wilderness designation, including the Table Mountain and Tioga Lake Further Planning Areas and portions of the White Mountains and Paiute-Mazourka Further Planning Areas. Table Mountain adjoins the John Muir Wilderness along Bishop Creek; Tioga Lake adjoins Yosemite National Park along Tioga Pass; White Mountains lies at high elevations in the Whites adjoining the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest and encompasses the Boundary Peak area in Nevada; and Paiute-Mazourka includes a large part of the Inyo Mountains.

All areas recommended for wilderness will be managed to maintain their wilderness attributes until Congress acts on these proposals. Further Planning Areas not recommended for wilderness will be managed under a variety of management prescriptions appropriate to their resources and existing uses.

The Plan recommends Whippoorwill Flat in the northern Inyo Mountains, representing the pinyon pine ecosystem, and McAfee Meadow in the Whites, representing the alpine fellfields ecosystem, for Research Natural Area status.

Wildlife and Fish

Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines will ensure habitat diversity adequate to provide for diverse and productive fish and wildlife populations. Habitat for all threatened and endangered species will be protected or enhanced to meet recovery goals. Special prescriptions have been developed for mule deer and mountain sheep habitat.

Budget

The Plan calls for an annual budget of \$12.5 million, an increase of \$5,100,000 over the current annual budget. Implementation of the Plan will depend on annual allocations from Congress. If annual budgets are significantly less than the Plan requires, some objectives and outputs may not be met. In that case, an amendment or revision of the Plan may be needed.

II. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Description of the Inyo National Forest

The Inyo National Forest covers 1.9 million acres in the Eastern High Sierra region of California and Nevada. It contains unique scenic and ecological sites such as Mt. Whitney, the highest mountain in the contiguous U.S. at 14,495 feet; Mono Lake; the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest; the Sierra Nevada, White, Inyo and Glass Mountains; the Palisades Glacier; and the Mono Craters. It serves as the principal watershed for Mono Lake and supplies water to the Los Angeles Basin. The Inyo has major winter and summer recreation areas, ranking third in recreation visits among National Forests nationwide. The Inyo contains the Mammoth Mountain and June Mountain Ski Areas; portions of the Hoover, Ansel Adams, John Muir, Golden Trout and South Sierra Wildernesses; the newly-designated North Fork and South Fork of the Kern Wild and Scenic Rivers; sections of the Pacific Crest Trail; the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area; and the Devil's Postpile National Monument, which is administered by the National Park Service.

Congress designated the North and South Forks of the Kern River as Wild and Scenic Rivers in 1987. A management plan for the rivers will be developed by the Inyo and Sequoia National Forests. The plan will determine wild, scenic, and recreation classifications for segments of the river; establish management objectives for each segment; determine river area boundaries; and establish management direction and appropriate levels of recreation use and development to protect wild and scenic values.

Six alternatives for managing the Inyo National Forest were analyzed in detail.

1. PRF: Preferred Alternative: This alternative balances commodity and amenity resources, with special emphasis being given to recreational values including uses based on fish and wildlife.
2. CUR: Current (1982) Program-No Action: This alternative continues the current management program.
3. RPA: Meet Targets and Goals of the 1980 Resource Planning Act Program: This alternative provides moderate to high outputs of commodities and selected amenities.
4. CEE: Maximize Cost-Efficiency: This alternative selects the most cost-efficient mix of management practices on the Forest.
5. AMN: Maximize Amenity Values: This alternative maximizes amenity outputs.
6. AMB: Emphasize Wildlife and Recreation: This alternative primarily emphasizes wildlife habitat with moderate expansion of the developed recreation program. Commodity outputs would be secondary to wildlife and recreation objectives.

III. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

In selecting the Preferred Alternative, I considered both monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits, the capability of the land, the need for protection of resources, concerns expressed by people interested in the Forest, advice received from other agencies and resource professionals, and the legislative mandate of the Forest Service. Therefore, national, regional, state, and local objectives were considered in making the decision.

The Preferred Alternative provides management direction that will result in the greatest long-term benefits to people, including the benefits of a healthy, diverse, and productive Forest environment. It provides a mix of amenity and commodity resources at reasonable levels and addresses the range of public concerns more effectively than the other alternatives.

The Amenity Alternative does not place enough emphasis on commodity outputs needed by local and regional industries and businesses; the Wildlife and Recreation Alternative emphasizes only those resources; the Current and Cost-Efficient Alternatives do not meet expressed demands for provision of non-market resources; and the RPA Alternative produces levels of outputs that exceed projected demands for resources from the Forest.

Response to Public Comments and Management Concerns

I chose the Preferred Alternative because it best responds to the following issues identified from public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

1. Management of the Mammoth/June Area

Issue: The Mammoth/June Area is defined by State Highway 203 on the south; U.S. 395 on the east; the Ansel Adams Wilderness on the west; and the June Mountain ridgeline on the north. Representatives of the alpine ski industry and the operators of the Mammoth and June Mountain Ski Areas did not want the Plan to limit development in this area. On the other hand there was public concern that any development, whether skiing or geothermal, would degrade the environment and be unsupportable because of water shortages and an inadequate transportation system and public utilities. There was also public support for maintaining the semi-primitive character of the area, protecting old-growth red fir stands, and providing additional recreation opportunities.

Plan response: Ski area development is limited to the approved plans of the Mammoth and June Mountain Ski Areas and development of Sherwin Bowl, if approved following environmental analysis and public comment. Additional significant development of any kind on National Forest System lands in the Mammoth/June area will require a study of cumulative effects.

Old-growth red fir stands in the San Joaquin area will not be harvested during this ten- to fifteen-year planning period. The public believed that harvesting red fir in this heavily used recreation area would destroy the area's character. Timber stands west of U.S. 395 will be harvested using uneven-aged management techniques to protect the recreation and visual values of the area.

2. Timber Management

Issue: Many people were concerned about the Allowable Sale Quantity. People dependent on the wood products industry advocated current or higher levels of timber production ranging up to the Resources Planning Act target of 16.8 million board feet. Other people expressed concern for possible adverse effects on scenic quality and wildlife and favored reduced harvests or no harvesting at all. There was support for use of uneven-aged management techniques either partially or exclusively on all timber lands. Some people opposed harvesting red fir in the Mammoth/June area and harvesting of Jeffrey pine because it would reduce the old growth component on the Forest.

Plan response: The Allowable Sale Quantity is reduced to 7.1 million board feet annually from the current 10.5 million. Predominantly red fir stands in the San Joaquin Ridge area will not be harvested during the planning period. However, about 14,000 acres of mixed stands of mostly Jeffrey pine and lodgepole pine on 30 to 60 percent slopes outside the red fir component could be harvested.

Jeffrey pine will be harvested to provide a continuing supply of wood to local markets. Most of the Jeffrey pine stands are east of U.S. 395 and receive little recreation use. Appropriate even-aged harvest methods will be used. Clearcutting will be used only where it is the optimum method to meet silvicultural objectives for the site. Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines will ensure adequate dispersion of old-growth stands of all forest types throughout the Forest.

Uneven-aged management will be used in the Mammoth/June area west of U.S. 395. Because uneven-aged harvest methods require only small openings, there will be less impact on visual and recreation resources in this heavily used area. High recreation values in this area justify the increased harvest costs associated with uneven-aged management.

3. OHV Management

Issue: Off-highway vehicle users wish to continue or increase opportunities currently available. Other people favor additional restrictions on both off-highway vehicle (OHV) and over-snow vehicle (OSV) use.

Plan response: The Poleta Canyon area will be the only open OHV area on the Forest. The existing 1977 Interagency Motor Vehicle Use Plan will be revised to conform with the Prescriptions and Standards and Guidelines of the Forest Plan. This will be done with public participation as part of Forest Plan implementation. Both OHV and OSV routes will be designated.

Some people interpreted Prescription #18 in the Draft Plan as permitting OHV use everywhere and Prescription #17 as permitting increased OHV use. They were concerned that increased OHV use on the Forest would have significant adverse effects on the environment. Both prescriptions have been rewritten.

Prescription #17 which was Limited Access in the Draft is now defined as Semi-Primitive Recreation with that emphasis in management direction. OHV opportunities will not be reduced. The Prescription states: "Allow OHV use only on designated roads and trails and in the Poleta Canyon designated open area. Allow OSV use off roads and trails unless restricted by the Winter Motor Vehicle Use Map."

Prescription #18 which was Open Roaded in the Draft is now defined as Multiple Resource Area and provides for a wide variety of recreation experiences. OHV opportunities may be increased if additional routes are designated in the revised Interagency Motor Vehicle Use Plan. The Prescription states: "Allow OHV use on both existing and new planned routes. OSVs may be used off roads and trails unless restricted by the Winter Motor Vehicle Use Map."

Restrictions will be established to prevent resource damage from OHVs under all prescriptions.

4. Range Management

Issue: Many people expressed concern that increased livestock grazing use would adversely affect riparian areas, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat.

Plan response: Grazing opportunities will remain at the current level of 41,400 Animal Unit Months annually. More restrictive Riparian Area Standards and Guidelines have been developed for the Plan to protect riparian areas and fish and wildlife habitat. Riparian areas will be restored. Projects to increase the quality and amount of forage outside riparian areas will be used to help offset reductions in grazing caused by restrictions on access to riparian and other sensitive areas.

5. Wilderness

Issue: Comments on wilderness ranged from "no additional wilderness" to "designate all Further Planning Areas and areas released under the California Wilderness Act of 1984 as wilderness." Some people expressed concern for protection of the wilderness attributes of Further Planning Areas not recommended for Wilderness.

Plan response: The Draft Plan had proposed 112,600 acres for wilderness designation. The Final Plan recommends an additional 60,000 acres bringing the forest total to 737,742 acres or 38 percent of the land base. The proposed areas are Table Mountain and Tioga Lake Further Planning Areas and portions of the White Mountains and Paiute-Mazourka Further Planning Areas. Wilderness recommendations are based on the wilderness attributes of the areas and the presence of existing uses that would conflict with wilderness management. Wilderness values will be protected prior to designation. Further Planning Areas not recommended for Wilderness designation will be managed under various prescriptions appropriate to their resources and current uses.

Additional specific concerns of the public are addressed in the Public Response Appendix.

Economic Efficiency of Alternatives

The Cost-Efficient Alternative has the highest Present Net Value, followed by the RPA Alternative. However, these alternatives do not reflect the high values Forest users place on non-market resources. If these alternatives were implemented, amenity values would be reduced. The overall desire of people for a natural-appearing landscape and other amenities is not adequately reflected in economic analyses. In many cases the scenic, recreation, and environmental values of the Inyo National Forest outweigh any potential economic returns from commodity products.

The Preferred Alternative was selected because it provides for more wildlife, fish, recreation, and visual resource benefits on the Forest than the Cost-Efficient Alternative. The Preferred Alternative is not the most economically efficient alternative, but it does provide the highest net public benefits. These benefits include such market outputs as energy, minerals, range, developed recreation, timber, and water supply; and such non-market outputs as scenic quality, dispersed recreation opportunities, fish and wildlife, and wilderness.

Contribution to Regional Production of Goods and Services

The Preferred Alternative will substantially increase skiing and other winter sports opportunities as well as a wide range of summer recreation activities including fishing, hiking and wilderness travel. These opportunities will primarily serve residents of Southern California who make up the major share of forest visitors.

Energy provided through geothermal development, power line rights-of-way, and small hydroelectric development on the Forest is also used mostly by Southern Californians. Forest water resources supply residents of the Los Angeles Basin. Mineral and range outputs from the Forest benefit the entire State and will continue to be provided under the Preferred Alternative, subject to appropriate Standards and Guidelines for protecting other resources.

Social and Economic Stability

Effects on jobs, revenues, lifestyles, and costs to the local economy were considered in choosing the Preferred Alternative. Public lands make up an overwhelmingly large share of the land base within those counties where the Forest is located. The resource and amenity values and recreation opportunities provided on the Inyo significantly affect the livelihood of the residents of those counties on public as well as private lands.

The Plan emphasizes protecting and improving scenic quality while continuing a level of timber harvest, grazing, energy, and mineral production that will not significantly curtail historic uses of the Forest. It best meets social and economic concerns by providing for additional development that is compatible with environmental quality goals and allows for more public use of the Forest to ensure that local lifestyles are not adversely affected. The Inyo will follow a policy of non-discrimination in providing work and recreational and educational experiences for the community and will promote active participation by all segments of the public.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The Amenity Alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative because it entails the least amount of resource development and public use. All other alternatives provide for higher levels of use and the environmental impacts associated with various resource developments. All alternatives, however, limit the effects of resource development and use to levels that are within legal standards.

Compatibility with Other Public Agency Goals and Plans

The goals and plans of other agencies and governmental bodies affected by implementation of the Plan were considered throughout the planning process. The Preferred Alternative incorporates information and recommendations received from many specialists in various agencies.

A number of agencies responded to the Draft Plan and their concerns were addressed in the Final Plan where appropriate. Agencies and governmental entities are contacted in the preparation of project-level environmental analyses and have the opportunity to comment on specific proposals. Continued coordination and cooperation with other resource agencies and local governments during implementation of the Plan will ensure that public needs are being met in the most economical and effective way.

Reasons for Selecting the Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative was chosen because it best meets the needs of people, including concerns for environmental quality. While other alternatives may be more desirable with respect to any particular consideration, none provides as good a mix of resource benefits and uses while maintaining a healthy and diverse natural environment.

The Preferred Alternative expands recreation opportunities; continues to supply wood products, minerals, and energy in an environmentally sensitive manner; sustains the current range program while protecting riparian areas;

protects and improves wildlife and fish habitat; recognizes the importance of scenic quality; protects soil and water resources; and recommends significant additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The Preferred Alternative best meets people's needs as identified by the entire public involvement process including responses to the Draft Plan and Environmental Impact Statement; resource needs as identified by resource professionals; and National Forest management mandates as identified in the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Forest Management Act of 1976, and their accompanying regulations. It provides the best mix of resource management activities considered appropriate for existing conditions or those that are predicted to be needed during this ten- to fifteen-year planning period.

The Preferred Alternative provides a balance between the environmentally preferred alternative and the most economically efficient alternatives. Although resource development and use provided by the Preferred Alternative will cause more impact on the natural environment than the Amenity Alternative, Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines and Management Prescriptions will ensure that the natural environment is protected.

The Preferred Alternative was selected over the Amenity Alternative for the following reasons: higher receipts, greater employment opportunities and economic benefits for all social groups, more potential for mineral development, more Animal Unit Months, a wider range of recreation opportunities, more timber produced.

The Preferred Alternative was selected over the RPA and Cost-Efficient Alternatives for the following reasons: better balance of resources and uses to meet the overall needs of people; better protection of cultural and biological resources, including old-growth forest, wilderness, deer habitat, snags, riparian habitat, and visual resources; lower management costs.

I judge that the Preferred Alternative will provide the greatest long-term public benefit when compared with the other alternatives that were considered in detail and have selected it to be the Plan for management of the Inyo National Forest for this planning period.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION, MITIGATION AND MONITORING

The Plan will be implemented no sooner than thirty days after the Notice of Availability of the Plan, Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision appears in the Federal Register. The time needed to bring all Forest activities into compliance with the Plan will vary.

Actual annual budgets will affect the rate of implementation of the Plan and the amount of goods and services produced in any given year but should not affect overall goals and direction. If the Forest Service determines that overall goals and direction of the proposed plan cannot be achieved, and that environmental objectives could be adversely affected because annual budgets differ from required budgets, the Plan may be revised or amended. This can only be determined as the Plan is implemented and monitored. For reference, the average annual budget for the Forest from 1985-1987 was \$7,400,000. Implementation of the Plan will require a budget of \$12,500,000.

As soon as practicable after approval of the Plan, the Forest Supervisor will ensure that all outstanding and future permits, contracts, cooperative agreements and other instruments for occupancy and use of National Forest land are consistent with the management direction of the Plan, subject to valid existing rights. This is required by 16 USC 1604(i) and 36 CFR 219.10(e).

Implementation will be guided by the management requirements contained in the Goals, Objectives, Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines, Prescriptions and Management Area Direction identified in Chapter IV of the Plan. These management requirements were developed through an interdisciplinary effort and contain measures necessary to mitigate or eliminate any long-term adverse effects resulting from activities on the Forest.

Outputs associated with Plan implementation may be adjusted as a result of new information and technology. Management direction in the Plan will be incorporated in the analysis of all proposed activities.

The purpose of the monitoring program is to evaluate whether Forest Goals and Objectives are being met, to determine how closely management requirements are followed, to assist in the assessment of the environmental condition of the Forest, and to determine whether an amendment to the Plan or a revision is needed.

The results of monitoring and evaluation will be used to measure the progress of Plan implementation and to determine when an amendment to the Plan or a revision is needed.

V. PLANNING RECORDS, AMENDMENTS AND REVISIONS, AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Planning Records

Planning records contain detailed information and document decisions used in developing the Plan and Environmental Impact Statement as required in 36 CFR 219.12. Documentation detailing the Forest planning process is available for inspection during regular business hours at:

Inyo National Forest
Forest Supervisor's Office
873 North Main Street
Bishop, California 93514

These records are incorporated by reference into the Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

Amendments and Revisions

The National Forest Management Act requires revision of the Plan at least every fifteen years. The Plan may be revised at any time when the Forest Supervisor determines that conditions or demands in the area covered by the Plan have changed significantly, or when changes in national policies, goals or objectives would have a significant effect on the Forest's program.

The Plan may also be amended. The Regional Forester will approve any significant amendments to this Plan. Determinations of significance or non-significance are appealable under 36 CFR 211.18 and will be documented in a Decision Notice.

Project decisions will require additional site-specific environmental analyses in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. As provided in 36 CFR 219.10, this decision will remain in effect until the Plan is revised.

Right to Administrative Review

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be in writing and submitted to:


Paul F. Barker
Regional Forester
Pacific Southwest Region
USDA, Forest Service
630 Sansome Street
San Francisco, California 94111

The notice of appeal, a statement of reasons to support the appeal, and any request for oral presentation must be filed within 45 days after the date of this decision.

Recommendations for wilderness designations are not appealable, as this decision is the purview of Congress. However, decisions regarding interim management of these areas pending action by Congress are appealable. Also, recommendations for Research Natural Areas are not appealable.

An appeal of my decision, in and of itself, does not stop implementation of the Plan, as a stay of this decision must be specifically requested. A stay may be requested at any time during the appeal period until a decision on the appeal is made by the Chief of the Forest Service.

No decisions on site-specific projects are made in this document, although a number of projects are identified. Those identified projects are included to show that the Plan's goals and objectives are achievable. Final decisions on site-specific projects will be made during subsequent implementation of the Plan after appropriate analysis and documentation consistent with National Environmental Policy Act requirements. These decisions are appealable.



PAUL F. BARKER
Regional Forester

AUG 12 '88

Date